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AUTHOR Holst, Janet
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ABSTRACT

The place of poetry in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and the role of linguistics are considered. It is suggested that poetry teaching has a place in advanced EFL learners' progreams as a means of extending the learners' knowledge of the language and increasing their sense of appropriateness and sensitivity to language use. The value of a linguistic approach to teaching poetry is discussed, and suggestions are offered to help the teacher present the poem in class and make a preparatory analysis of a poem prior to class presentation. In addition, a list is presented of appropriate poems for students, grouped according to their exploitation of linguistic and poetic resource. Specially, the objective is to teach the communicative function of poetry (i.e., to discover how language is deployed to convey the poet's perceptions and concepts that make up the poem's unique view of reality, and its total imaginative, aesthetic, and linguistic effects). Difficulties posed by a new lexis, syntax, and interference resulting from the students' familiarity with the poetic features and resources of their native language are noted. It is suggested that the selection of poems be made on linguistic rather than aesthetic grounds. The poem "Ambulances" (Philip Larkin) is used to illustrate a linguistic approach to teaching poetry. Teachers are advised to consider the poem as a whole and the patterns apparent at different levels of the poem (grammatical features, lexical features, phonological features, and graphological features). (SW)

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LINGUISTICS AND THE TEACHING OF POETRY TO ADVANCED LEARNERS OF EFL

Janet Holst

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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1. THE PLACE OF POETRY IN EFL TEACHING

It is not difficult in theory to justify the inclusion of poetry in any advanced general English course. Yet in practice it has little or no place in most EFL syllabuses, and where, it does form a part of the student's curriculum, is often regarded with suspicion - as an "optional extra", or as an opportunity for the student to brush briefly against the Great Names of literature and the "Cultural Tradition".

Yet the study of poetry in EFL instruction has real value - not, that is, the peering over the literary shoulders of the teacher at an explained and interpreted text that so often passes for Literature, but the close study of language in use. The foreign student needs to be acquainted with the variety of types of discourse for which his new language is used. He needs an awareness of the differences between common and rare types of English, and of alternative possibilities of expression, for in his second language he has less of an intuitive sense of the linguistically appropriate or the conventions of usage. Advanced language instruction should therefore incorporate a variety of types of discourse - including a range of the literary and poetic.

In addition to its motivational value in learning English, (it is, after all, "real" language, about interesting things, people, situations and ideas; its themes and subjects are the stuff of human experience in all its complexities) it provides a rich source for both teacher and pupil of shared vicarious experience - immediately accessible because of its self-contextualized nature - which can be a stimulus for discussion, further study and expression (Rodger and Ure 1968, p. 4).

Linguistically, poetry displays the consummate range of the expressive resources of the language: lexical, grammatical, orthographical and phonological and hence can be a source of vocabulary enrichment and syntactic patterns not met in other contexts. Close study can increase the student's awareness of the communicative potential of the English language and his own facility and range of expression. Because of its peculiarly "sonoric" quality, the result of language carefully chosen and often highly wrought, much poetry is easily memorable and can provide for the student a corpus of English sentences he can listen to many times, with sustained interest and even incorporate unconsciously into his "auditory memory bank" (Arthur 1968, p. 207).

More important, perhaps it provides an antidote to the automatised formulaic language - "strips of language gummed together" Orwell called it - the foreign language student is so often reared on in those courses which comprise drills and the repetition of expressions and responses, and which can have the effect of "imprisoning" him in restrictive, familiar language situations, governing the content and tenor of his discourse and limiting his communicative effectiveness.

2. WHAT SHOULD OUR AIMS BE?

While a study of poetry in FL teaching can have a cultural aim - e.g. to acquaint students with ways of looking at the world which characterise the cultures of English speaking peoples - restricted to this it can degenerate to mere study <u>about</u> poetry, become reduced to the level of mild sociological observation, static and boring ...

As suggested above, our aim should be to develop the students' capacities for individual response to language use and specifically, to guide them to a realisation of the way in which poetry English is used to express messages that are unique and beyond the expressive scope of the conventional language code (Widdowson 1975, pp. 76-77).

Sensitivity and response to language usage are not developed through mere exposure to poetry, or through mediation by the teacher in "translation" or explanation. They are the result of guided but direct and personal confrontation with the language of poetry, and it is for the English teacher to provide this independent "access" to poetry by teaching some form of analytic strategy, so that the student can eventually arrive at his own interpretations (and not rely timorously on "cribs" or critics' comments) which are based on systematic examination of definite evidence - the language - and not on intuitive stabbing at the whole.

Our aim then, will be to teach the <u>communicative</u> function of poetry, i.e. to discover how the language is deployed to convey the poet's perceptions and concepts which make up the unique view of reality that is the poem, and its total effect - imaginative, aesthetic and linguistic - as a piece of communication.

Because the language of poetic discourse is a special, extraordinary use of the language code, a knowledge of the conventions and form of poetry, seen against the comparative background of "normal" language, must be developed before the student can reach that level of independent interpretation and appreciation. This development can be active, with the learner guided to discovery by a thorough preparation and skilful questioning from the teacher.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF POETIC DISCOURSE

It is difficult to specify what features are characteristic of poetry since poetry is the most creative, open-ended use of the language, embracing a vast range of styles, techniques and features of language use, and exploitations of the language beyond the confines of conventionality. Nevertheless, there are identifiable features of language use which are peculiar to the poetic discourse and with which we will want our students to become acquainted. First, poetry is communication. What are communicated are a poet's perceptions and concepts which, otherwise inexpressible, are somehow fused (through a manipulation of the language code into highly wrought, self imposed patternings of sound and meaning) with the reader's/listener's experience, association and sensitivity, so that a new dimension of reality becomes apparent: this is the 'poetic experience'.

How is this brought about?

1) The poem, as a piece of communication, or discourse, is self-contained. It is its own world, having neither social antecedents nor consequences, demanding no responses. It is therefore a unique form of communication.

2) While the poet creates this communication, he is not necessarily the "addresser". As has been pointed out (Leach 1969 ; Widdowson 1975, p. 48), the "I" in a poem may be, variously, a book, a foetus, a corpse, and therefore simultaneously embodies a third person quality. Similarly, the "addressee" of a poem may be inanimate (a Grecian urn, the wind) and there is a consequent fusion of second and third person. In poetic discourse, then, there is a dislocation of the normal communication situation.

3) The poem represents a deliberate choice of framework to convey and contain the poet's message - to <u>be</u> an essential part of the message. The creation of this form is the poet's preoccupation. The form and meaning are one - the "aesthetic inevitable". In normal communication, the meaning is distinct from the conveyance, the message form. (The telephone does not "mean"). But the "message" of a poem cannot be subtracted or removed from the form without the poem's ceasing to be.

4) The poem as communication is curiously "bimodal", being a carefully combined, self-conscious written form, reworked and patterned, yet using speech cues and being highly aural in appeal.

5) The poet employs the normal language code within his chosen form, but because his "message" is something beyond the scope of this code, the language is wrought, broken, reforged, infused with new meaning and patterned into the poetic form, so that while it is clearly recognisable as English, yet it is often curiously deviant, contrived and therefore, somehow, not.

6) It is this patterning of language which is most distinctive about poetry, and in the creation of his patterns the poet exploits freely the phonetic, lexical and syntactical features of the language code. The product is a unique, idiosyncratic piece of discourse, and the patterning devised, part of what he wants to say.

This patterning counterpoints with and against all levels of the linguistic code.

(i) Graphetic features - punctuation, shape and stanzaic form - are the results of careful and deliberate choice, and form part of the message of the poem. E.E. Cummings in his poem <u>I(a</u> manages to "freeze" time with the juxtaposition of a (sad) solitary falling leaf and its associations of passing time (seasons), within a graphetic statement of singleness which occurs four times within the word loneliness:

l(a
le
af
fa
ll
s)
one
l
iness

i.e. l ("one")
one (one)
l one
iness (oneness
I-ness)

(ii) In poetry there is patterning of the phonological features of the language code, with the manipulation, contrast, repetition or juxtaposition of sound units to create rhythm, mimetic and onomatopoeic effects, which pattern in with the message and other features of the code.

Metre assumes an important function for it makes us most aware of underlying speech ryhthms: it can disturb the normal run of emphasis, giving unexpected prominence or lightness to syllables; it can foreground items which have no apparent lexical or grammatical support; and can act as cohesion, linking parts or anticipating connections within the poem.

(iii) Because the poet is in pursuit of the elusive, the conventionally inexpressible, he is compelled to devise a new language with the "old" words and in his search for precision of expression he may "break open" a word to reveal fresh significance (as E.E. Cummings does by writing

so
! f !
t ... (Cummings 1923-54)

Here Cummings's re-setting of the word makes a pun on the musical abbreviation for "loud" (forte), to produce the suppressed exclamation : "so loud!")

The poet may forge neologisms or add meaning by affixing and compounding words.

He may play with ambiguity, depending on the plurisignificant nature of words, and through the complex interweavings of connotation, denotation and association in the reader's response, suggest "multi-strands" and deeper significances of meaning. Chimia Achante in Refugee Mother and Child

(No Madonna a child could touch
That picture of a mother's tenderness ...)

plays with the ambiguity of "touch" : - match, equal;
- evoke feeling, arouse;
- reach,

so that simultaneously we absorb all the strands in the one reading (Haynes 1976 p. 56).

Or by recategorising a word and attributing to it a different grammatical function the poet can juxtapose new meaning over the conventional, so that the two blend and there is a "spread" and "overlapping" of significance.
(E.E. Cummings does this in his lines

my father moved through dooms of love
through sames of am through haves of give
(1923-54 p. 373).)

He may break the collocational "rules" of the code and bring together hitherto unrelated - even - antonymic words to reveal fresh relationships and significance.

(iv) Syntactic patterning created by the poet's use of structurally equivalent antithetical or repetitive structures is another feature of poetic discourse.

At every level, then, in poetry we find conscious patterning of language, a patterning which inter-relates and counterpoints. The deviations themselves are not random, but form a pattern which is "foregrounded" against the background of normal language usage and knits the poem into a cohesive unit (Leach 1969, p. 54).

Cohesive links within a poem are strengthened by the weaving of images and semantic associations and the use of other devices not restricted to poetry, e.g. deictics, sentence links.

These then are those main features of poetic discourse that our advanced students of English would need to be acquainted with if they are to become appreciative of the full communicative potential of the language they are learning.

Our aim would be not only to develop in the student a set of strategies with which he could tackle a poem and arrive at an interpretation through his own efforts, but that the practice in comprehension, the sharpening and enrichment of his vocabulary and the experience of a diversity of means of expression, would extend his own range and facility of language use.

However, in our idealism and anxiety to reveal what is "best" about our language, we must not lose sight of the cold fact that these are foreign learners of English.

4. PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

It would be insensitive and unwise to confront them with material so complex linguistically that it lay beyond their grasp and ability to use language. This would not only possibly erode the student's confidence and kill much of his motivation for learning the language, but would seem irrelevant to his needs and consequently engage neither his interest nor participation (Widdowson 1975, p. 82).

In his encounters with poetry the student will inevitably face the difficulties of new lexis, and even when a word is known, it is unlikely that it will evoke the same degree of recognition as would their mother tongue equivalents. Moreover, how can we expect from a

foreign language learner that added sensitivity to the "different" language of poetry, so often metaphorical, or the fusion of code and context meaning with poetic "patterning".

There will be difficulties caused by syntax. The curiously elliptical characteristic of poetry results from the poet's pruning away of what he regards as "peripheral" to the essence of his message - in linguistic terms, those very redundant elements which are necessary to ensure comprehension and in consequence, the EFL student faces a content of excessive density, frequently embedded in contorted syntax with which the functional language of his instructional programme cannot cope.

Further, one has to be aware of the linguistic features of normal varieties of non-literary English before one can see what a poet is making of them. The EFL student, normally speaking, does not have a large enough "corpus of competence" in ordinary language to be sensitive to the deviations and manipulations of poetic discourse, and the significance of what a poet has carefully foregrounded may be missed. Poetry will be mere words - and obscure ones at that.

John Nist (1971, pp. 21-25) points out another difficulty that even highly proficient foreign students might experience in encountering English poetry at first - a sort of "aesthetic interference", when the student, familiar with the poetic features and resources of his own language, searches for these in English poetry and failing to find them, is unable to appreciate the subtlety of what he is confronted with.

Nist summarises various prosodic systems identifying their special features and relating them to various languages as shown:

Prosodic Systems	Organisation	Languages
1. Parallelistic	Kindred thought rhythms	Hebrew; Aramaic
2. Intonational	Pitch heights & contours	Hindi; Cl. Chinese
3. Quantitative	Syllabic duration	Arabic; Cl. Greek
4. Numeric	Syllabic count	French; Japanese
5. Accentual	Stress patterns	English; German

He cites the examples of a Japanese student approaching English poetry and looking for a syllabic count, and the Israeli searching for the parallel thought patterns that characterise his "own" poetry, and

suggests that when teaching a homogenous group the teacher should initially endeavour to select English poetry which most closely resembles the organisation of the L_1 poetry For example, the Japanese student might be more sensitive to some of the poems of William Carlos Williams; the Israeli to Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass.

There will be difficulties in our attempts to teach poetic discourse, yet if we are to be faithful to our ideals as language teachers of developing communicative competence and something akin to the native speaker's notion of appropriateness in our students, we are compelled to try.

5. FACTORS IN THE SELECTION OF MATERIAL FOR STUDY

Obviously, the age, ability and proficiency of the students - the extent of their English study - are crucial. Important, too, is the teacher's linguistic knowledge, his "sense of tactics and literary tact" (Rodger and Ure 1968, p. 5). What the teacher selects for study - its linguistic appropriateness and interest value - will determine the degree of his success.

It is important to remember at this point that it is not our aim to introduce our students to the Great Names of English poetry. Too often this approach - it happens, too, in the traditional, chronological romp through centuries of English poetry - results in the teacher merely mediating (translating and interpreting) between text and student. And the teacher may, in his anxiety to share his prior experience and deep love of poetry, misjudge his pupils' level of response, or eager that the significance of the poet's message be grasped, expound at length, but in so "private" a language that "his own words are literally the only ones available to the students" for talking about it (Doughty 1968, p. 54).

What we aim to teach is an awareness of language use in the expression of "reality" outside the scope of conventional language. Selection, then will be made on linguistic rather than aesthetic grounds. The material should be linguistically - and experientially - accessible to the learner, i.e. within his capacity to understand in terms of the language used and the slice of life or experience it portrays.

Some writers (e.g. Harrison 1974, p. 54) have insisted there should be no discontinuity between the lexis, structure and styles of the literature encountered, and between the student's own mastery of lexis, structure and style, but perhaps this is excessively stringent and restricting. It could be argued that some degree of struggle in the analysis and grasping of the grammar of a difficult poem can result in better understanding and appreciation.

However, there are basic skills the student needs to have in order to make sense of a poem if he is to do so without relying on ready-made interpretations.

He needs (1) sufficient command of lexis - not only knowledge of a number of words, but a realisation that there can be a variety of possible uses for a given word

(2) the ability to construe normal syntactic structures and associational interrelations

(3) the ability to follow non-linear patterns of interconnections which make for artistic coherence (Haynes 1976).

He is always going to encounter new lexis - and will always be at a disadvantage - but this is not an insurmountable difficulty: the dictionary can become a part of the poetry lesson in initiating discussions about the use and significance of particular words.

Difficulties of syntax and plurality of meaning can often be elucidated by the construction of tables during the lesson, so that the student can see the relationships.

The teacher needs to choose initially what is stylistically simple, culturally bridgeable, compatible with genuine literary utterance and likely most effectively to develop sensitivity of response (Widdowson 1975, p. 85). He could assemble a collection of appropriate texts, grade them roughly in order of difficulty and group them according to their exploitation of various structures.

e.g. Present participles

Cargoes, Masefield
Child on Top of a Greenhouse
Poem without a Main Verb

(See Appendix II)

6. THE ROLE OF LINGUISTICS

The poetry studied will be selected initially for its linguistic and pedagogical suitability: our approach to it will be linguistic in that we will focus on specific features of the language use to ascertain their meaning and effect. But it is not intended that techniques of linguistics will feature in the lessons: these will be part of the teachers's preparation so that he can devise questions and exercises which will direct students to the use of the language and the effects it achieves.

Nor is it intended the teacher should make a full linguistic description of all features of the text, something beyond the abilities of the average teacher and not guaranteed to help reach a satisfying interpretation. Rather, the teacher's analysis will be to discover those stylistic features which are foregrounded and key to an understanding of the poem. His approach will be diagnostic: What is happening here? What does it mean? How does it convey meaning? (What, in addition to information?) What does the language do in addition to what the rules of grammar require it to do? The problem with this approach is the difficulty of finding a starting point and of hazarding intuitively upon the "stylistically significant". How can one be sure a vital feature has not been missed? Ideally, there should be some grid or matrix or procedural model which a teacher could apply to any poem to ensure adequate coverage and consideration. But, as Crystal and Davy (1969) point out, the range of poetry is so vast, embracing ballads, sonnets, limericks, odes, that it is impossible to specify dimensions. There is no "one way" to approach a poem: it defies type-casting.

A framework, intended as a "check list" or guide to the repetoire of exploitations possibly found in poems is set out in Appendix I.

Obviously it is not comprehensive, nor will all features be equally important or even apparent in every poem studied, but it could be helpful in objectifying what a teacher feels intuitively about the impact of a poem but is otherwise unable to express in impersonal terms which are readily accessible to the student.

7. AMBULANCES: A LINGUISTIC APPROACH FOR THE TEACHER

Ambulances

Closed like confessionals, they thread
Loud noons of cities, giving back
None of the glances they absorb.
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,
They come to rest at any kerb:
All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,
Or women coming from the shops
Past smells of different dinners, see
A wild white face that overtops
Red stretcher-blankets momently
As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness
That lies just under all we do,
And for a second get it whole,
So permanent and blank and true.
The fastened doors recede. Poor soul
They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air
May go the sudden shut of loss
Round something nearly at an end,
And what cohered in it across
The years, the unique random blend
Of families and fashions, there

At last begin to loosen. Far
From the exchange of love to lie
Unreachable inside a room
The traffic parts to let go by
Brings closer what is left to come,
And dulls to distance all we are.

Philip Larkin
The Whitsun Weddings
Faber and Faber, London 1964.

The poem expresses the questioning dread of sickness, death and its aftermath that is evoked by the stopping of an ambulance outside a city house.

On first reading one might notice the general structure of the poem: five verses with Verse 1 graphetically separated from the others by a full stop, and semantically a prologue to the other four verses which are run-on. Another break marking a semantic shift occurs with the semi-colon between Verses 3 and 4. A pattern of end rhyme is established throughout the poem with an abcbca scheme.

What are those features that we will want our students to be aware of?

1. A starting point might be the repetition of the unmarked deictic pronominal they in Verse 1, linked anaphorically to the title: they thread ... they absorb ... they come. "They" unmarked has an anonymity and mysteriousness which is further developed in that verse.

   "Closed" is given a positional prominence (and hence added stress) which is further heightened by its initial plosive /k/. This combination of syntactic and phonological prominence gives added semantic value and the importance is echoed and reinforced:

   ll. 2-3 "... giving back/None of the glances they absorb";

   ll. 19-20 "borne away ... may go the sudden shut of loss";

   l. 27 "unreachable inside a room ..."

   and so the notion is established, and heightened by the use of "absorb", that the ambulance is closed and inscrutable and whatever goes inside it is inaccessible, "borne away" and irretrievable. A semantic link between closed and confessionals is established in the simile, and strengthened phonologically by the repetition of /l/ and /k/: (closed like confessionals) so that the reader is forced by the common phonological elements to consider the semantic properties the two lexical items share. Confessionals has semantic associations of secrecy, mystery beyond human understanding, absolution and mediation between (imperfect) life and after death. Like confessionals, ambulances are closed, secret, mysterious and mediating in a sense between life and death.

The anonymity and mystery established is reinforced in 1.6: the use of the passive form and the monosyllables of equal stress value give the sentence the impersonality and inevitability of a public announcement and regulation.

All streets in time are visited
Cf All rooms are cleaned daily
or All books are checked thoroughly

This is the voice of authority beyond the control of the individual, remote, inscrutable.

The choice of "in time" creates an ambiguity - in time / at some/time / throughout Time

so that we are further reminded of the inevitability of death.

2. A second point of focus might be the verbals. A listing of active finite verbs shows the majority have inanimate subjects. Ambulances thread, absorb, come to rest; a face overtops; doors recede; traffic parts, brings closer, dulls. Humans merely see, sense and whisper. Humans as agents are absent, so the patient has only a face, a thing which is carried and stowed. Life is merely "something nearly at an end," thus the feature of /+animacy/ is removed, and "things" instead have life: Ambulances thread, absorb, and do not give back.

3. A further matter we would wish our students to be aware of is the patterns of contrasts which the poet weaves throughout the poem. By pointing out some of the contrasts initially we can encourage students to spot others and discover the poet is playing a "game" with contrasts.

giving back ... absorb
see ... and sense
white face ... red blankets
overtops ... lies just under
at an end ... begins
cohered ... loosen
parts ... brings closer
let go by ... what is left to come

There are contrasts set up by homophonic ambiguities, so "something nearly at an end" is

borne	away in	deadened	air
born?		dead end?	heir?

4. We can also observe the exploitation of time as a theme and cohesive link. The structural equivalences and tight elliptical nature of the lines in the last verse might make them obscure to the student. A starting pcint could be to get the student to search for inter-relationships and contrasts which involve time words.

We could start with "loud noons of cities" and consider what is unusual about this structure. We might elicit that it is fairly normal to speak of

(i) loud <u>horns</u> / <u>roars</u> (of traffic) (in) cities; and

(ii) <u>mornings</u> in cities;
<u>noons</u>
<u>nights</u>
<u>days</u>

(iii) and <u>parts</u> / <u>areas</u> of cities; but not

(iv) loud <u>mornings</u> / <u>noons</u> / <u>nights</u> / <u>days</u> of cities

<u>Noons</u> is given the simultaneous semantic features of /+noise/, /+place/ and /+property/.

It takes on geographical, countable and performance features. Further allusions to time follow:
<u>All streets in time</u>; <u>momently</u>; <u>and for a second</u>; <u>permanent</u>; <u>across the years</u> - so that we have two scales, it seems: what is brief, temporary and fleeting, and what stretches out over the vast distance of Time.

The poem concludes: " The traffic parts to let go by
Brings closer what is left to come
And dulls to distance all we are."

Larkin sets up a pattern of balanced contrasts, metrically equivalent, and with phonological links ("left"/"let",) so that the fleeting, discrete periods of time (noons, moments, seconds ... and life times?) are juxtaposed in contrast on the vastness of eternity - "what is left to come". The ambulance, disappearing into the distance, has a zoom effect that telescopes time by bringing simultaneously the realisation that death, inevitable, is imminent and the prelude to a vast eternity, while our own lives are pushed back into Lilliputian insignificance - mere specks in Time.

Dual reference is a feature of the poem. The line "Brings closer what is left to come" conveys not only a statement of the inevitable (death is all that is left), but simultaneously asks the question: what is left to come? In Verse 3 further ambiguities are set up. We <u>see</u> and <u>sense</u> (yet it has already been hinted that the issue lies beyond human understanding, so in that sense is <u>non</u>-sense) the "<u>solving emptiness</u>" (emptiness solves? is a solution?) that "<u>lies</u> just under all we do". It is the choice of <u>lies</u> that makes the pun, being polysemic.

i.e. <u>lies</u> 1. rests
2. deceives

But it is the pattern of relational contrasts that has been set up that carries the second interpretation through:

"And <u>for a second</u> get it whole
So <u>permanent</u> and blank and <u>true</u>"

So the lies and deceits, the brevity and incoherence of our lives are contrasted with the completeness, permanence and truth of eternity. The tight knit cohesion of the poem, woven by the semantic associations of time and patterns of contrasts further heightens the disconnected nature of our life whose strands "begin to loosen" at (the) last.

8. AN APPROACH FOR THE STUDENT

It will be recalled that our principal aim in poetry teaching is to develop in the learner some kind of analytic strategy which he can apply to other poems - not just to reach an interpretation of this particular poem. To do this we need to devise questions which will engage him in active study and discovery.

An initial reading of the poem will be followed by questions and discussion aimed at directing attention to the text. The first few questions following the establishment of the situation might be:

- How do we know <u>they</u> are ambulances in Verse 1?
- What phrases describe them?
- What other things animate or inanimate, might "come to rest"? Why does Larkin use it about ambulances?
- Why does he not use the word <u>ambulance</u> in the poem?

<u>Further questions for study are set out below</u>

<u>Question 1</u>: If we re-wrote the first line as follows what different effect would it have?

<u>Ambulances, closed like confessionals thread</u>

List the features you think ambulances and confessionals have in common.

<u>Question 2</u>: Consider these 3 sentences. In what context might you find them?

A. All doors are locked at 10.30 pm.
B. All patients are visited weekly.
C. All boxes are cleared at 9.00 am. daily.

What similarities does the line "All streets in time are visited" share with A, B and C above?

<u>Question 3</u>: List all the finite verbs and their subjects.
Make two columns.
I. Verbs with human subjects
II. Verbs with non-human/inanimate subjects.

What type of verb is more common in the poem?

What conclusion can you draw about the "action" of the poem?

Question 4: Underline the phrases and words which express time in the poem.

Make two columns.

I. Brief time

II. Permanence

Try to list those underlined words and phrases in the more suitable column.

Question 5: By choosing words which have similar sounds in common a poet can suggest the existence of closer similarities of meaning.

(a) Show how closed and confessionals have similar sounds in common.

(b) In what ways are families and fashions alike in sounds and meaning?

The study of a poem on a related topic might follow. Auto Wreck by Karl Shapiro is the subject of an effective and visually evocative film whose text is the words of the poem read carefully and slowly with considerable impact.

The students could compare the different approaches to a similar theme and focus on points of similarity and difference in language use.

9. SUMMARY

My aim has been to show that poetry teaching has a real place in the advanced EFL learner's programme as a means of extending the learner's knowledge of the language and increasing his sense of appropriateness and sensitivity to language use.

The value of a linguistic approach in tackling a poem has been maintained and suggestions made to help a teacher make a preparatory analysis of a poem prior to class presentation. Suggestions for approaching a poem with a class have been made and a list of appropriate poems for students grouped according to their exploitation of linguistic and poetic resource is appended.

APPENDIX 1 How to tackle a poem: a teacher's inventory

A. Consider the poem as a whole first

What do we learn about the situation within the poem?

- Is the situation an imaginary one?
  or personal one?
- Is there an "inner world" to the poem?
  (Who are the participants? Who addresses whom?
  What is the nature of the discourse?)

B. Consider the patterns apparent at different levels of the poem

What are the perceptible patterns in usage and deviations in usage? How does each level of patterning contribute as a cohesive element in the discourse?

Selective consideration of:

1. Grammatical Features

(i) Stanzas

- sentence length;	Is there a pattern apparent?
- number of sentences per stanza;	Is there a change in pace/tension caused by variation of sentence length?
- number of lines per sentence.	Does the silence between stanzas "act"?
	Is there end-rhyme?
	Note the pattern. Is it recurrent?
	How does it cohere?

(ii) Structural Cohesion

- degree of syntactic complexity or simplicity;	What patterns are apparent?
- use of paratactic, dependent, subordinate clauses;	How do they affect the content of the lines?
- use of equivalent structures: parallel, antonymic, positional equivalence?	- reinforce?
	- counteract? contradict?

(iii) Non-structural Cohesion

use of deictics
submodifiers
pronominal linkages

How are items identified
- within the poem?
- with reference to the title?

Is there any suspending of identification?

(iv) Grammatical Functions

- nominals: animate/inanimate
  abstractions

Are there recategorisations of function?

What effect do they have?

- verbals: finites/non finites
  actives/passives
  tense/aspect
  subjects

Are there noticeably high frequencies or absences of one type? Deviations of function?

2. Lexical Features

- choice of words;
- repetition of lexical items;
- recurrent items from same lexical set or class/member relations;
- collocations;
- looser semantic connections between lexical items;
- deviations: neologisms; ambiguities; affixations; compounds

What other words might the poet conceivably have chosen?
Why this/these?

How do the repetitions and/or recurrent related items cohere the text?

Is anything additional to information conveyed?

3. Phonolgical Features

(i) phonemic patterning:

repetition; contrast;
mimesis/onomatopoeia

How do the patterns add to the cohesion of the poem?

Do they lead to ambiguity when it is spoken aloud?

(ii) metrical form:

stress-marked? absent?
rhythm - regularities
- irregularities
rhythm and rhyme

4. Graphological Features

shape; spacing;

typography; punctuation

capitalisation

Are there significant features?

How are these employed to convey the message of the poem?

5. General Considerations

- What features seem significantly foregrounded by deviation or repetition?
- What effect does this have?
- Where else in the language can this be found?
- Is there recurrent imagery? Sustained imagery?
- What effect would the alteration of those features foregrounded have?

APPENDIX II A list of suggested poems
(Numbers refer to the sources on p 24)

A. Using Present Tense

Cato, Nancy - Swagman (4)
Cummings, E E - In Just (5)
Enright, D - A Polished Performance (1)
- The Poor Wake Up Quickly (1)
Hughes, Ted - Hawk Roosting (1)
Oleghe, Pius - A Sudden Storm (9)
Peters, Laurie - Parachute (9)
Thomas, R S - January (1)

B. Using Past Tense

Brock, Edwin - A Moment of Respect (1)
Causley, Charles - Ballad of the Bread Man (4)
Frost, Robert - Dust of Snow (4)
Holbrook, David - Fingers in the Door (1)
Larkin, Philip - Days (2)
- Mr Bleaney (2)
Roethke, Theodore - Night Crow (3)
- Snake (3)
Stronach, Bruce - Last Run (4)

C. Using Participles

Davie, Donald - Time Passing, Beloved (1)
Hart-Smith, W - Tractor (4)
Larkin, Philip - As Bad as a Mile (2)
Roethke, Theodore - Child on Top of a Greenhouse (3)
- Transplanting (3)
Rubidari, David - African Thunderstorm (8)
Wain, John - Poem without a Main Verb (1)

D. Using Imperatives

Amis, Kingsley - The voice of Authority: a language game (1)
Holub, Miroslav - The Door (6)

E. Using Questions

Auden, W H - What is That Sound? (4)
Roethke, Theodore - The Pit (3)

F. Repetitive Structures

Auden, W H - Refugee Blues (9)
de la Mare, W - The Listeners (4)
Noyes, Alfred - The Highwayman (4)
Wilde, Oscar - Extracts from The Ballad of Reading Gaol (4)

G. Lexical Contrasts

Enright, D J - On the Death of a Child (1)

H. Metaphor, Simile

Causley, Charles - Timothy Winters (4)
Shapiro, K - Auto Wreck (4)
Thomas, R S - Evans (1)
Voznesensky, K - The First Ice (7)

I. Mimesis, Onomatopoeia, Rhyme

Hopkins, G M - Extracts from The Wreck of the Deutschland
Roethke, Theodore - The Lady and the Bear (3)
Vachel, H - First Fight (4)

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(3) Roethke, Theodore Collected Poems Faber
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(5) E E Cummings 73 poems Faber
(6) Watts, J (ed) 1972 Interplay Longmans
(7) Silkin, J (ed) 1973 Poetry of the committed individual Penguin
(8) Bright, J A and McGregor, G P 1970 Teaching English as a second language Longmans
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